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(54) **FOOD ITEM COOKING, ASSEMBLY AND PACKAGING SYSTEM AND METHOD**

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See application file for complete search history.

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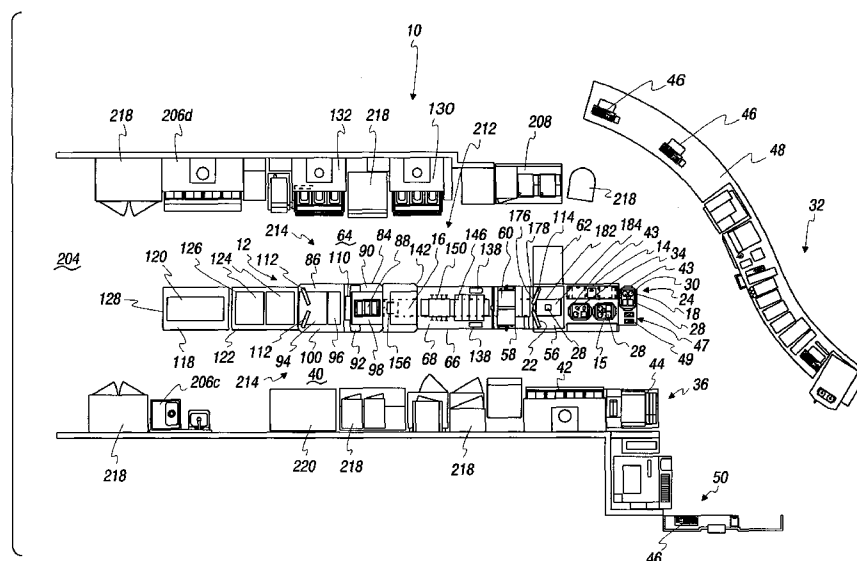
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method for making a food item are provided. The apparatus includes a food item assembly and packaging station having a first work area for assembling and packaging a food item and a food order assembly station having a second work area for assembling a food order that includes a food item packaged on the first work surface. A conveyor is positioned beneath the first work area and extends from a position proximate to the first area to a position proximate to the second work area. A conveyor access opening is proximate to the first work area to provide worker access to the conveyor to permit manual placement of a food item assembled and packaged at the first work area onto the conveyor for conveying the packaged food item beneath the first work area to the location proximate the food order assembly station.

22 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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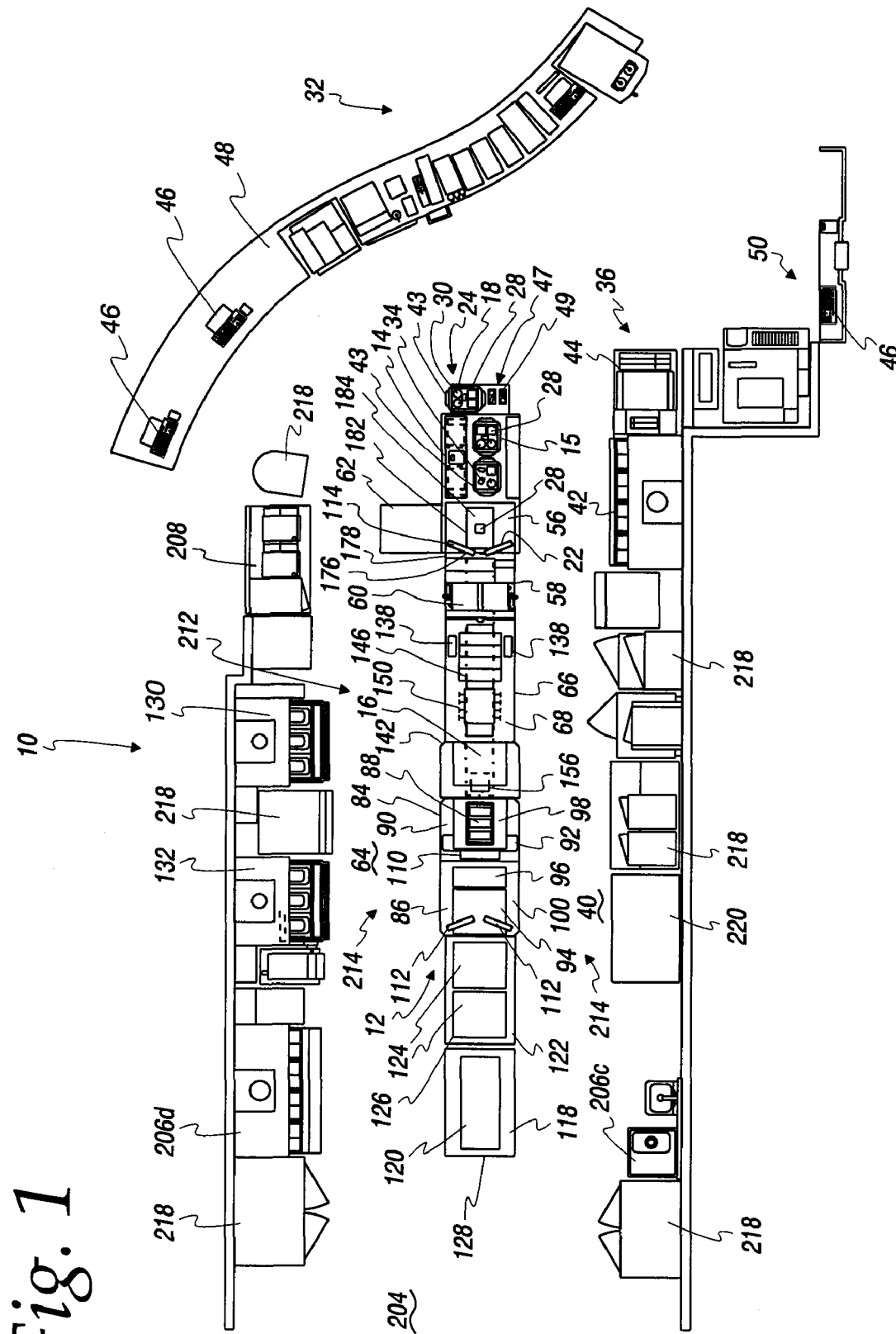
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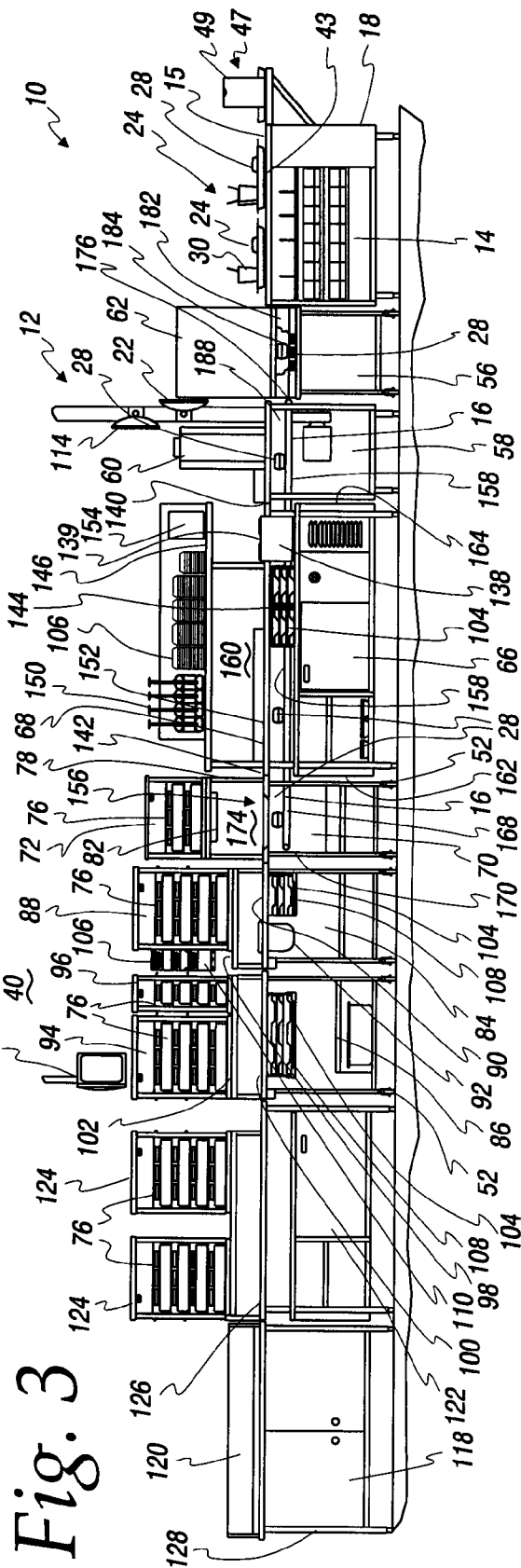
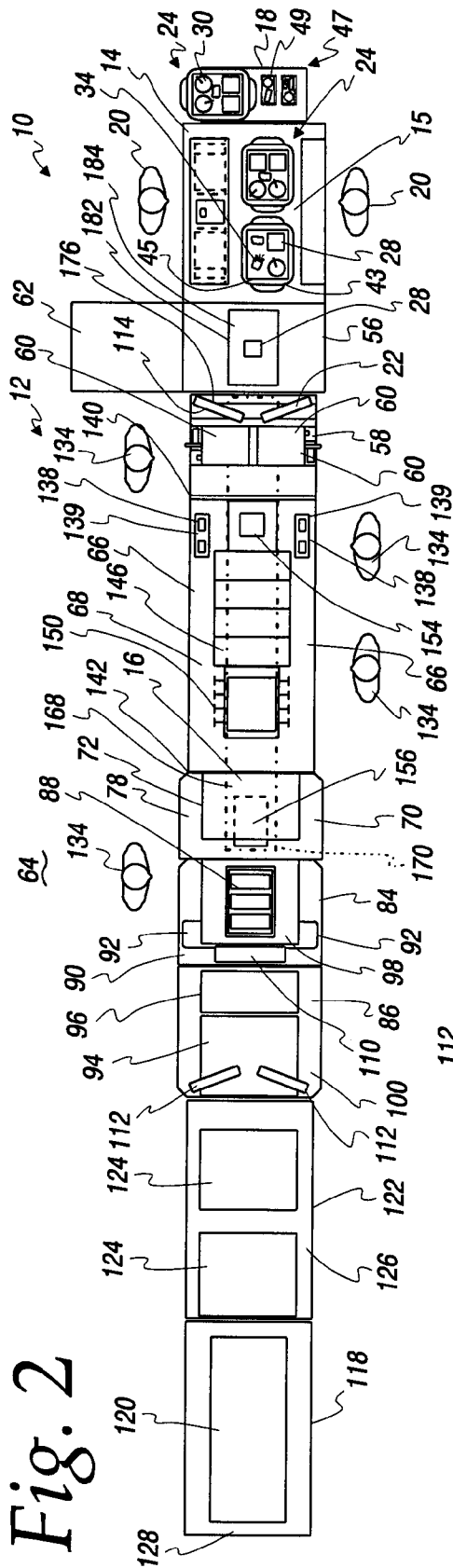
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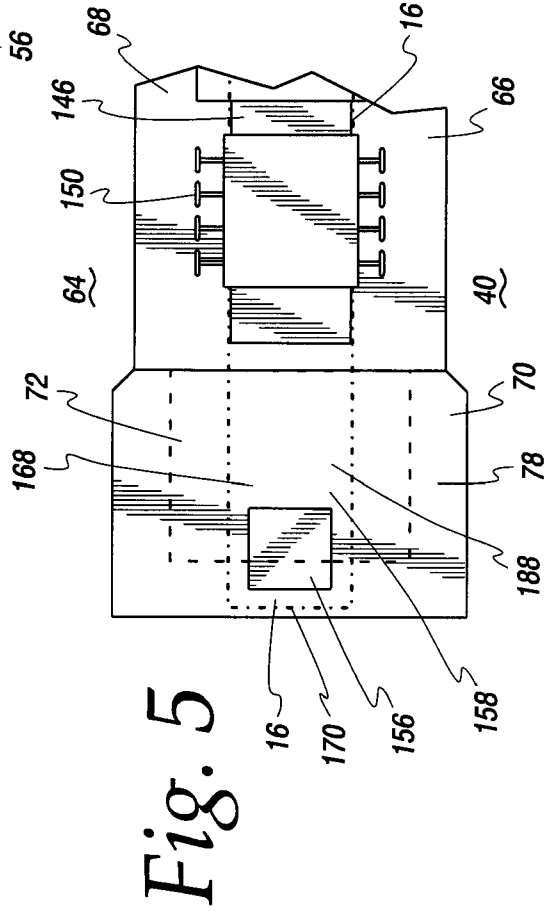
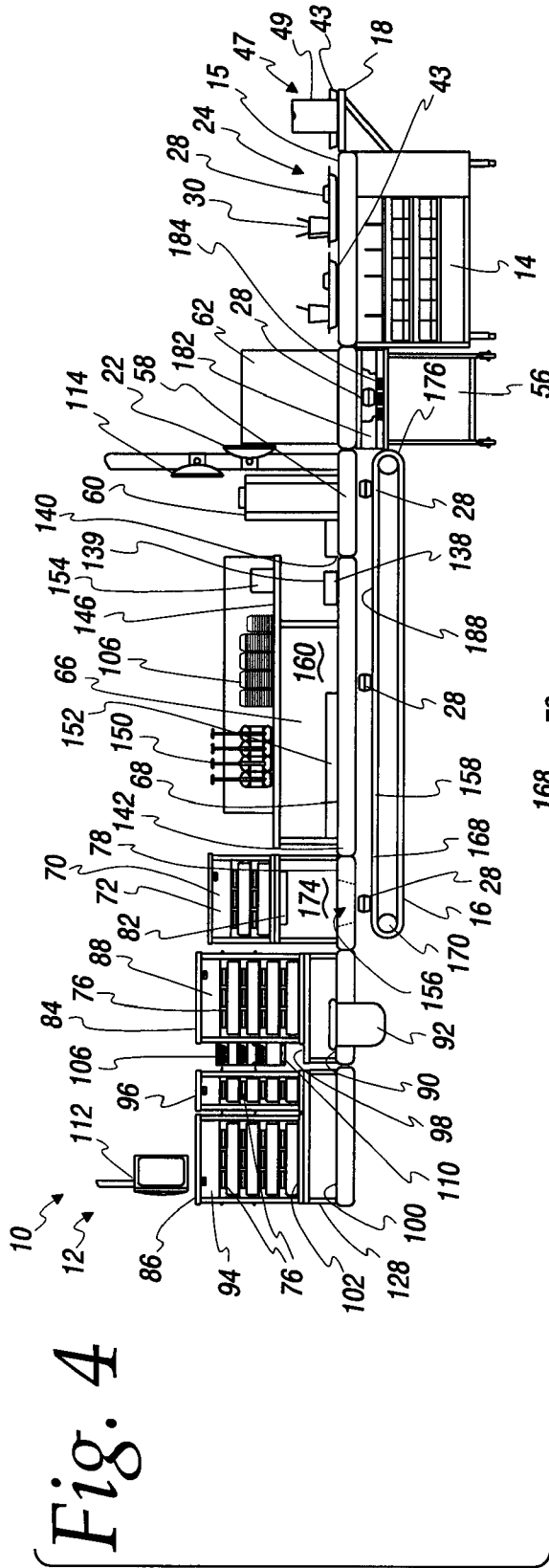
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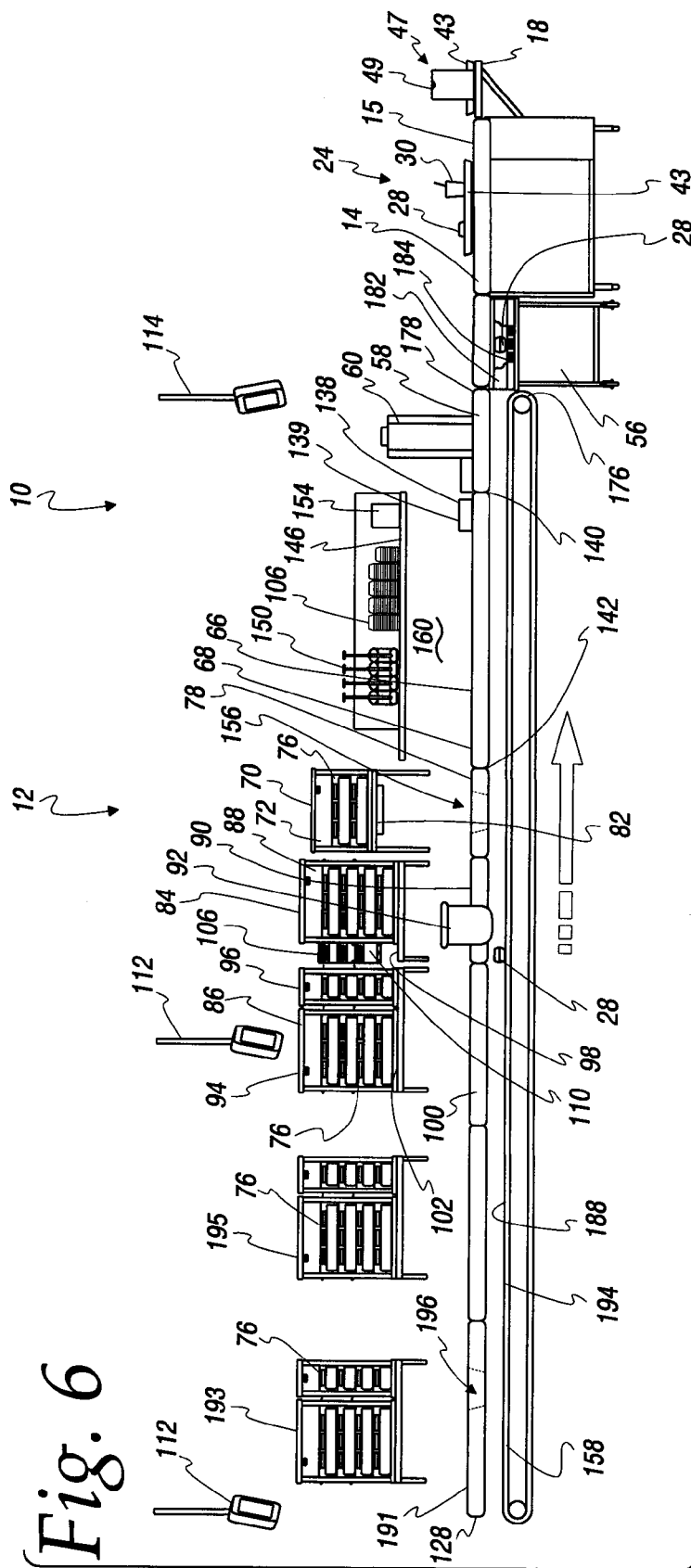
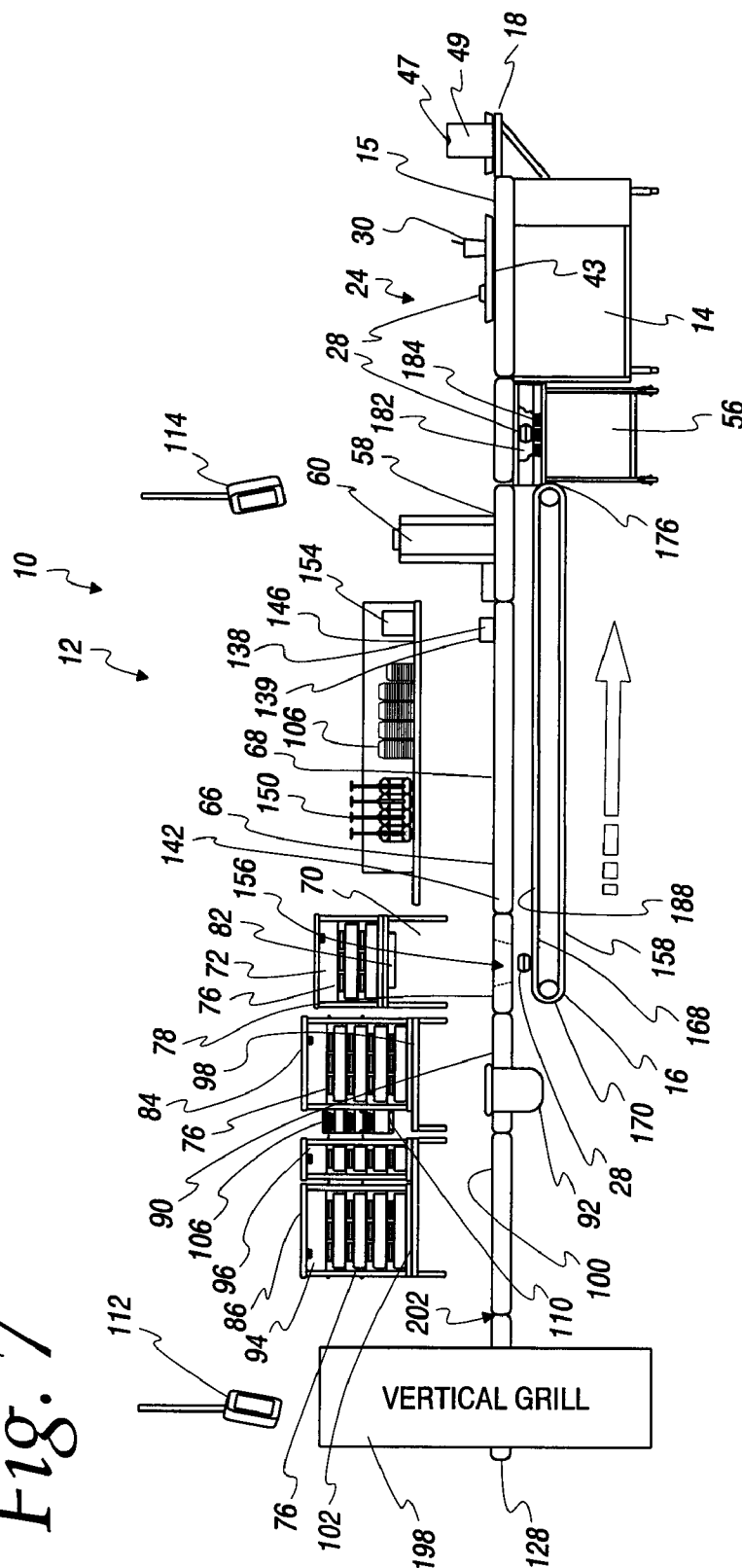


Fig. 7



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**FOOD ITEM COOKING, ASSEMBLY AND
PACKAGING SYSTEM AND METHOD****CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATION**

This application is a division of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/079,113, filed on Mar. 25, 2008, pending, the entire disclosure of which is hereby expressly incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a food item cooking, assembly and packaging system, method and kitchen particularly suited for a quick-service restaurant.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In a typical quick service restaurant, meals ordered by customers include various food items. Typically, restaurant workers prepare and package these food items at various and relatively diverse areas within the kitchen. Additionally, the components of a food item order and the equipment, supplies and packaging used to prepare, assemble, and package a food item may also be diversely located requiring a worker to travel about the restaurant to accomplish the task of preparing a food item. For example, food items may include buns that need to be conditioned or toasted, sandwich fillings, such as hamburger and sausage patties, chicken and fish filets, and fried and folded eggs, for example, that need to be cooked and thereafter assembled in a sandwich, packaging for the food items such as suitable wrappers, bags or other containers. Crew members or workers are required to travel to various locations within the restaurant to obtain the components that are to be included in the assembled and packaged food item, which may be, for example, a hamburger sandwich. Once the food components are obtained and the food item is assembled and packaged, the packaged food item is then typically manually transported by a human worker walking to one or more food order assembly areas where the packaged food items are then assembled as part of a food order including the packaged food item and other items such as drinks. Over the course of the day workers move numerous times between various locations in the store such as to and from cooking food component, assembly, packaging and food order assembly locations. Worker movements can create bottlenecks at certain locations of the kitchen, and the paths the workers travel may crisscross paths traveled by other workers. This is especially true in the generally limited confines of a quick service restaurant, and also is a particular problem during peak order periods wherein numerous orders must be filled at a rapid pace. Moreover, typical kitchen layouts are an inefficient use of labor adding to the cost of operations.

A need exists for a kitchen system, layout and method of making or assembling food items and packaging them that increases labor efficiencies for food item assembly and packaging, particularly for a quick-service restaurant.

A need exists for a more labor efficient kitchen layout, particularly for a quick-service restaurant.

A need exists to reduce bottlenecks and path crossing of workers that assemble and package food items, particularly in a quick-service restaurant.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention a system and kitchen layout for making an assembled food item is pro-

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vided. As used herein, the term "system" means an arrangement of things. The system includes a food item assembly and packaging station having a first work area for assembling a food item and packaging an assembled food item and a food order assembly station that is located remote from the food item assembly and packaging station. The apparatus includes a second work area for assembling a food order that includes at least one packaged food item packaged at the first work area. A conveyor is positioned to extend from a location proximate the first work area to a location proximate the second work area for conveying a packaged food item from a location proximate the first work area to a location proximate the second work area toward the food order assembly station. A conveyor access proximate to the first work area provides worker access to the conveyor to permit the assembled and packaged food item at the first work area to be manually deposited at the conveyor access opening onto the conveyor for conveying the packaged food item beneath the first work area to the location proximate the food order assembly station. Typically, the conveyor is located below the first and second work areas, although the conveyor can be located in whole or in part above, below, at the same level as or otherwise with respect to the first and second work areas.

In accordance with the invention, the apparatus and kitchen may further include at least one food cooking or food heating device proximate to the first work area for cooking food items. The cooking device can be of any suitable type, including, for example, grills (which may be clamshell grills), toasters, fryers, egg cooking devices, conventional and microwave ovens and any other type of cooking or food warming device.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention the first work area includes a first work surface and the conveyor access comprises an opening in the first work area.

In accordance with still another aspect of the invention the first work area has a first side and a second side, each side providing a worker access to the first work area. The conveyor access opening is positioned to be readily accessible to a worker positioned adjacent either of the first and second sides of the first work area.

In accordance with a further aspect of the invention the system includes a secondary work station that is positioned proximate to the food item assembly and packaging station. The secondary work station is adapted for assembling and packaging food items of a different type than those packaged at the food item assembly and packaging station.

In accordance with an additional aspect of the invention the system includes a secondary work station positioned proximate to the food item assembly and packaging station. The secondary work station has a second work surface for assembling and packaging food items and the conveyor access opening is an opening in the second work area.

In accordance with still another aspect of the invention the system includes at least one storage surface at the food item assembly and packaging station for storage of packaging for packaging a food item at the first work area.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention the system includes at least one cooked food storage device proximate to the first work area for staging a cooked food item filling that is included in a food item assembled at the first work area.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention the system includes at least one bun conditioning device positioned proximate to the first work surface for conditioning a bun included in a food item assembled at the first work surface. The bun conditioning device may steam a bun, toast a bun, or both steam and toast a bun.

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In accordance with another aspect of the invention the system includes a plurality of secondary work stations each having at least one work area at which assembling or packaging a food item takes place.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, each of the stations is modular and repositionable within the system to allow reconfiguration of the order of the stations within the apparatus.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention a method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order is provided. The method includes providing a first work area for manually assembling and packaging food items, providing a second work area for assembling a food order that includes a food item packaged in the first work area, providing a conveyor for conveying a packaged food item to the second work area, and providing a conveyor access opening proximate to the first work area. The food item is manually assembled and packaged at the first work area and thereafter the packaged and assembled food item is deposited at the conveyor access opening onto the conveyor and thereafter conveyed beneath and along the first work area to the second work area. Thereafter, a packaged food item conveyed from the first work area to the second work area is included in a food order that is manually assembled at the second work area wherein the food order includes the conveyed, packaged food item. Typically, the conveyor is located below the first and second work areas, although the conveyor can be located in whole or in part above, below, at the same level as or otherwise with respect to the first and second work areas.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention the method includes providing a supply of packaging proximate to the first work area, providing a supply of cooked food item filling proximate to the first work area, and providing a supply of buns for forming the food item proximate to the first work area. The supply of packaging, cooked food filling and buns are manually accessed during assembling and packaging of a food item at the first work area. A supply of items for assembling a food order is provided proximate the second work area and is manually accessed to assemble a food order at the second work area.

The method may include providing at least a third work area for manually assembling and packaging a food item. The third work area is positioned upstream of the first work area, and the third work area includes a conveyor access opening therethrough to provide access to the conveyor.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention the method further includes providing at least third and fourth work areas for manually assembling and packaging a food item. The third work area and fourth work area are positioned upstream of the first work area with a conveyor extending underneath the third work area. A first type of food item is assembled and packaged at the first work area. A second type of food item is assembled and packaged at either of the third or fourth work areas. The second type of food item is conveyed after packaging to the second work area for inclusion of the second type of food item in a food order assembled at the second work area.

Other advantages and features of the invention will become apparent from the following description and from reference to the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic view of the restaurant layout in accordance with the present invention;

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FIG. 2 is a top plan view of the system in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a side elevation view of the system shown in FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary schematic side view of the system shown in FIG. 3 illustrating the conveyor positioned underneath the work surface and the location of the food item drop off point;

FIG. 5 is a fragmentary top plan view illustrating the conveyor access opening;

FIG. 6 is a fragmentary schematic side view of the second embodiment in accordance with the invention illustrating an extended conveyor with a second food drop off point;

FIG. 7 is a fragmentary schematic side view of another embodiment in accordance with the invention illustrating a vertical grill included in a system for assembling and packaging food items; and

FIG. 8 is a schematic view of the restaurant system and layout in accordance with the present invention illustrating additional components of the restaurant system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms, there are shown in the drawings and described in detail herein, several specific embodiments with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as exemplifications of the principles of the invention and is not intended to limit the invention to the embodiments illustrated.

In a typical prior art quick-service restaurant layout, workers typically are required to walk individually prepared food items to a food order assembly area where they are included with other items as part of an assembled food order that is then delivered to a customer. This is not only a relatively inefficient use of labor, but can create traffic bottlenecks in the vicinity of the food order assembly area, especially in the confines of a quick-service restaurant which generally has relatively limited space. Additional labor inefficiencies arise due to hindrance of worker movement by the crisscrossing paths of workers moving about as they access required items for preparing different types of food items, such as inventory, supplies, food item components, cooked food staging devices and other equipment that is diversely located within the kitchen.

FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary system and kitchen layout 10 for a quick-service restaurant in accordance with the present invention. The system and kitchen layout 10 is highly efficient since required worker travel distance to prepare a food item and assemble a food order is substantially reduced. Moreover, interference between workers moving about the kitchen is also substantially reduced. Kitchen layout 10 includes a food item assembly line 12 that is used to prepare food items ordered by restaurant customers. Food items that are prepared, assembled and/or packaged on assembly line 12 are conveyed on an underneath conveyor 16 to a food order assembly station or module 14 positioned at the downstream end 18 of assembly line 12. Such food items typically include sandwiches of various types, such as hamburger sandwiches, chicken sandwiches, breakfast egg sandwiches, such as Egg McMuffin® sandwiches, and other sandwiches typically served in a quick-service restaurant. Food items conveyed to food order assembly module 14 typically also include chicken nuggets, Chicken Selects®, breakfast egg orders, hot cakes and the like.

The use of conveyor 16 reduces the distance traveled by a worker since travel back and forth to the food order assembly

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station is reduced or eliminated. Worker travel distance may further be reduced by also using conveyor 16 to convey other food items prepared, assembled, and/or packaged in locations of kitchen layout 10 but off-line of assembly line 12. For example, a salad order may be prepared and packaged in a location that is upstream of food order assembly station 14 and across an aisle along assembly line 12, and thereafter conveyed to the food order assembly station 14 by conveyor 16. Transporting food items, whether prepared on or off assembly line 12, by means of conveyor 16 also is advantageous in providing a more orderly flow of food items into food order assembly station 14.

As described later in greater detail, in another aspect of the present invention, worker efficiency is increased by localizing or linking by food item type, the locations for cooking food items, storing cooked food items, and assembling and packaging of food items. Thus, the placement of inventory, supplies, cooking equipment, cooked food storage equipment, packaging supplies, buns, cooked sandwich fillings, condiments and the like that are associated with cooking, staging, assembling and packaging of food items is based on individual food item types. By creating localized kitchen areas within the quick-service restaurant kitchen along or proximate to assembly line 12, worker efficiency is further increased by reducing the distance traveled by workers in the performance of their duties in the quick-service restaurant. Examples of localized kitchen areas may also include a regular menu region where the primary functions of hamburger sandwich, filet of fish sandwiches may take place. Another localized area may be a breakfast food region that is primarily dedicated to the preparation of breakfast food items. Optionally, the main menu and breakfast menu regions may include further localized sections. For example, the breakfast menu region may have subsections for preparing different individual types of breakfast food items, such as a subsection for breakfast sandwiches and a subsection for breakfast egg food items.

Returning now to a more detailed description of the functions required for food order assembly, in FIG. 2 a food order assembly worker 20 is shown stationed at a work area or surface 15 for food order assembly station 14. Worker 20 views a list of the contents of each food order to be assembled. Such listing may be provided on an optional display screen 22 as shown in FIG. 3 that electronically displays specific details of pending food orders that need to be assembled. An assembled food order 24 typically includes a packaged food item 28 such as a packaged sandwich that has been assembled upstream on assembly line 12, and generally additional meal items. These additional meal items may include food items that may not typically be suitable for efficient transport on a conveyor, such as drink 30, an order of French fries 34 packaged in an open top container laid on its side, and the like. Drink 30 for food order 24 can be obtained by food order assembly worker 20 from a proximately located drink order station 32. Drink order station 32 includes dispensers for various types of drinks such as sodas, iced tea, shakes, coffee, smoothies and the like. An order of French fries 34 is obtained by worker 20 from French fry station 36, that also preferably is located proximate to the food order assembly station 14, such as across the assembly line aisle 40. French fry station 36 typically includes French fry cooking vats 42, French fry holding bin 44, and packaging (not shown) for individual French fry orders 34.

Food order assembly station 14 is also preferably positioned proximate to POS registers 46 at customer service counter 48, and POS register 46 at the drive-thru delivery area 50. Thus, by locating food order assembly station 14 proximate to the food order delivery areas of counter 48 and drive-thru delivery area 50, labor efficiencies are provided that complement the reduction in labor expenditures that are obtained when assembling and packaging food items on assembly line 12 in accordance with the invention. Typically, food orders 24 to be consumed in the restaurant are assembled on a tray 43 having a paper mat 45 placed thereon. Drive-thru food orders 47 typically are packaged in a bag 49. Storage for trays 43, paper mats 45, bags 49 and other such required items is provided at or proximate to food order assembly station 14.

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Food item assembly line 12 preferably is of a modular construction as can best be appreciated by viewing FIGS. 2 and 3. Some or all of the modules may be made mobile by including wheels 52 to allow easy configuration and reconfiguration of the modules of assembly line 12 as required to best meet the needs of a particular quick-service restaurant. The present invention also may be advantageously practiced, however, without a modular construction. For example, assembly line 12 may be constructed as one integral work surface having various sections or work areas located along assembly line 12 at which the work functions conducted at the various modules are performed.

The exemplary configuration shown in FIGS. 2 and 3 illustrates assembly line 12 configured for the efficient assembly of a plurality of different types of food items. Examples of these types of food items include hamburger sandwiches, cooked chicken product filled sandwiches, cooked fish fillet filled sandwiches, and breakfast sandwiches such as Egg McMuffin® sandwiches, and cooked eggs. Assembly line 12 also is adaptable for other types of sandwich and food items where a work area for preparing, assembling and/or packaging the food item is desired. Positioned at downstream end 18 of assembly line 12 is food order assembly module 14. Adjacent to and upstream from module 14 is a packaged food item staging module 56 for receiving and staging packaged food items 28 conveyed thereto. Packaged food items 28 are held at module 56 until included as part of a specific assembled food order 24. Packaged food item staging module 56 preferably includes a heating means for maintaining the packaged food items at an elevated temperature. Upstream from packaged food item staging module 56 is a steamer/toaster module 58 that includes a steamer/toaster device 60 for steaming and then toasting bun crowns and heels that are then used to make a sandwich. A supply of buns may be kept in storage cabinets at module 58, or adjacent modules, or held in an optional mobile bun storage rack 62 positioned in aisle 64 or aisle 40 along assembly line 12.

Positioned upstream of module 58 is a food item assembly and packaging module 66 that includes a work area such as preparation surface 68 at which food items are assembled. Typically, preparation surface 68 will be the primary work surface at which the largest number of food items are assembled, such as, for example, a regular menu food item like hamburger sandwiches. Preparation surface 68 at module 66 also provides a location at which condiments are added to sandwiches or other food items assembled there. Sandwiches assembled at module 66 can also be packaged on preparation surface 68, typically by wrapping in a sheet of paper or placing in a closeable carton. Also included at assembly module 66 is conveyor 16 which is positioned underneath and extending along preparation surface 68. As described below in greater detail, conveyor 16 is provided as one means of increasing worker productivity for assembly line 12 by automatically transporting food items assembled and packaged on assembly line 12 to food order assembly module 14.

Positioned upstream from the food item assembly module 66 are additional or secondary stations or modules 70, 84, and

86, each of which typically includes staging means for staging cooked sandwich fillings at an elevated temperature. Each of secondary modules **70**, **84** and **86** typically also include additional work surfaces that provide secondary work areas for preparing and/or packaging food items. Generally, the type of food item that will be prepared on secondary work surfaces of modules **70**, **84**, and **86** is different than the type of food items that will be prepared at the primary preparation surface **68**. This allows workers to simultaneously prepare different types of food items on assembly line **12**, with the workers also having proximate access to the different inventory and items associated with a particular type of food item, such as cooked sandwich filling, buns, condiments, sauces, packaging and the like.

As shown in the exemplary configuration of assembly line **12** of FIGS. 2 and 3, secondary module **70** includes a cooked food storage device **72** that is most suitable to stage a type of cooked food item assembled or packaged at a work surface at or proximate to module **70**. Cooked food storage device **72**, for example, a universal holding cabinet (UHC) is used to stage one or more types of food product to be used as the food item, or a component of a food item, such as a cooked sandwich filling to be placed into a sandwich. Cooked food storage device **72** may be used, for example, to stage cooked hamburger patties or cooked fish fillets. Typically, a plurality of individual cooked food products of the same type is placed in a tray **76** soon after cooking. Tray **76** is then placed in cooked food storage device **72** until a cooked food product such as a cooked sandwich filling is needed to make a sandwich. A cooked food product placed in trays **76** in the cooked food storage device **72** maintains its temperature, moisture and freshness until used as a cooked food sandwich filling. A preferred example of such UHC equipment is disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,119,587, 6,209,447 and 6,607,766, the entire disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference. Cooked food storage device **72** is supported above a work surface **78** that is included at secondary module **70**. Especially at times of high food item order activity, work surface **78** also provides an additional work area upon which food items may be assembled including food item types that generally are assembled at other modules. Secondary module **70** may also include storage drawer **82** for utensils such as tongs used in withdrawing cooked sandwich fillings from food storage trays **76** of cooked food storage device **72**. In the exemplary configuration, secondary module **84** and secondary module **86** are positioned upstream from secondary module **70**. Secondary module **84** includes a cooked food storage device **88**, such as a UHC cabinet for staging cooked food items or cooked sandwich filling in trays **76**. Secondary module **84** also includes a work area such as work surface **90**. Typically, work surface **90** generally will be used to assemble and package a food item that is taken from cooked food storage device **88** at module **84** or from a cooked food storage device at an adjacent secondary module. Secondary module **84** may additionally include an alternative type of food staging device, such as a hot water holding bath **92**. Hot water holding bath **92** is a type of cooked food storage device that is more advantageous than a UHC for storing certain types of cooked foods such as breakfast sausages, for example. An example of such hot water holding bath equipment is disclosed in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/413,385 filed Apr. 28, 2006, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. Secondary module **84** may also include a second work surface **98** above work surface **90**.

Secondary module **86** includes additional cooked food storage devices, such as separate cooked food storage devices **94**, **96**, that typically may be used to store different types of

food items, such as different types of cooked food sandwich fillings. Secondary module **86** also includes a lower work surface **100** and an upper work surface **102** for the assembling and packaging of food items. Packaging materials such as paper wrappers **104** and food item cartons **106** associated with food items assembled at module **86**, are stored at shelving **108**, **110** respectively. Shelving **110** may be located at secondary module **84**, secondary module **86**, or both.

Display screens **112**, **114** are provided to electronically display food item orders needed to be assembled and packaged in assembly line **12**. When an order is entered at the computerized POS register **46**, the particular food item order is caused to appear on display screens **112**, **114**. Alternatively, the POS computer system may be programmed to selectively distribute food item order information to only one of displays **112**, **114**. For example, sandwiches or other food items typically assembled at secondary modules **70**, **84**, **86** may be displayed only on display **112**, while for example a food item, such as hamburger sandwiches typically assembled at module **66**, may only be displayed at display **114**. Also, to prevent a particular food item order from being inadvertently prepared in duplicate, once a particular food item order is assembled (or once assembly is initiated), means may be provided to indicate on displays **112**, **114** that the particular food item order has been assembled, or is in the process of being assembled. For example, assembly line **12** may include worker input means to cause displays **112**, **114** to indicate that a food item order is or has been assembled as a way to inform other workers that they should work on other food item orders.

Assembly line **12** optionally also may include one or more in-line cooking modules for a food item. For example, a breakfast eggs cooking module **118** includes a cooking device **120** for cooking breakfast eggs, such as scrambled eggs. An optional additional secondary module **122** also may be included with cooked food storage devices **124** and work area **126**. Typically, eggs cooked at cooking device **120** will be stored in cooked food storage devices **124** and packaged as a food item at work area **126**.

In the exemplary kitchen layout **10**, cooking devices such as clamshell grills **130** and **132**, are positioned across aisle **64** proximate to assembly line **12** and to secondary modules **70** and **84**. Thus, for example, hamburger patties may be grilled at clamshell grill **130** and stored at secondary module **70** in cooked food storage device **72**. Chicken sandwich fillings for chicken orders, such as chicken nuggets and Chicken Selects® may be grilled at grill **132** and stored at cooked food storage devices **94** and **96** at secondary module **86**. Additional modules for cooking, storage and food item assembly and packaging also may be optionally placed upstream from upstream end **128** of assembly line **12**. This additionally would allow expansion of assembly line **12** for purposes such as increasing the output capacity of assembly line **12**, or for the assembling and packaging of additional types of food items, including those food items later added to the quick-service restaurant menu. Optionally, if desired, grills **130** and **132** may also be positioned in an in-line configuration along assembly line **12**. The same is true for drink station **32**, fry station **36** and other such stations.

In order to better appreciate the labor efficiencies provided by assembly line **12** and better understand its operation, a detailed description of food item assembly and packaging at module **66** is provided. Food item assembly and packaging module **66**, in one desired preferred mode of operation, is typically primarily dedicated to the assembling of hamburger sandwiches and fish fillet sandwiches. When a hamburger or fish sandwich order appears on display screen **114**, the first

task of a food item assembly worker **134** is to condition a bun for such sandwich. To do so, a sandwich bun is taken from a supply of buns stored at module **66**, or alternatively within mobile bun storage rack **62**. In the case of a hamburger sandwich order, the heel and crown of the buns are steamed and toasted in steamer/toaster device **60**. Preferably to conserve lateral space along assembly line **12**, steamer/toast device **60** has a vertical feed path. In the case of a fish filet sandwich, the bun heel and crown are steamed at one of the steamer devices **138**. Preferably, steamer device **138** is positioned adjacent to end **140** of preparation surface **68**. Typically, steamer device **138** is operated by manually placing a bun heel and crown onto steamer device **138**, and therefore is positioned so as to be conveniently accessed by a worker at preparation surface **68**. Steamer device **138** may be recessed within preparation surface **68** so that its operable top side **139** is at, or near, the level of preparation surface **68**. Optionally however, steamer devices **138** could alternatively be located at other nearby positions such as at the steamer/toaster module **58** or at end **142** of preparation surface **68**. Typically, while the buns are being steamed and toasted, packaging for the sandwich is placed on preparation surface **68**. Depending on the size and type of sandwich, such packaging may include a paper wrapper **104** or a carton **106** that are preferably stored at module **66** at shelves **144**, **146** respectively. The heel of a steamed or a steamed/toasted bun is placed on, or in the packaging that has been placed on preparation surface **68**. Thereafter, a cooked sandwich filling, such as a hamburger patty or cooked fish filet, is removed from one of trays **76** and placed on the bun heel. Based on customary practices and on the information displayed on display screen **114**, condiments, sauces and toppings are added to the partially assembled sandwich. For example, ketchup, mustard, sauces and the like may be dispensed from a dispenser **150**, and lettuce, sliced tomatoes, relish, onions and the like are taken from individual containers (not shown) positioned in condiment containers **152**. The crown of a steamed bun or a steamed/toasted bun is then placed on the sandwich to complete its assembly. The packaging of the sandwich is then finalized by folding wrapper **104** or by closing the sandwich carton **106**. A printer **154** is also provided for printing a label such as 'extra ketchup' or 'no salt' that can be affixed to the packaging of a special food item order for easy identification of any special orders by order assembly worker **20**.

In order to substantially reduce labor time required to manually transport a food item assembled at food order assembly module **66**, conveyor **16** is used to automatically convey the packaged sandwich to food order assembly module **14**. Importantly, conveyor **16** is positioned so as to minimize intrusion into space that is generally considered optimal for worker usage in preparing and packaging food items. Generally, for convenience and efficiency in making sandwiches it is preferred that preparation surface **68** be positioned at a height that is about waist high for a typical food item assembly and packaging worker **134**. The work space **160** above preparation surface **68** is considered optimal work space, since it is within convenient and quick reach of worker **134** without requiring worker **134** to bend over, such as to access spaces below preparation surface **68** and work space **160**. Therefore, the top of belt **158** of conveyor **16** is preferably located below preparation surface **68**. By positioning conveyor **16** below preparation surface **68**, the work surface area of preparation surface **68** is not reduced by the presence of conveyor **16**. Moreover, the entire work space **160** that is above preparation surface **68** also is free from interference of the presence of conveyor **16**. Thus, work space **160** is more advantageously preserved for frequently accessed items, such

as cartons **106**, condiment containers in condiment container holding bin **152**, condiments in dispenser **150**, wrappers **104**, bun steamer **138**, steamer/toaster device **60** and cooked food storage device **72**, for example.

In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. **2**, **3** and **6**, conveyor **16** not only extends along the entire length of preparation surface **68**, but also extends outward from both the upstream side **162** and the downstream side **164** of food item assembly and packaging module **66**. Thus, the upstream portion **168** of conveyor **16** extends into the adjacent secondary module **70**. Conveyor **16** is positioned below work surface **78** with its upstream end **170** of conveyor **16** within secondary module **70**. Work surface **78** in module **70** is preferably located at the same height as preparation surface **68** to provide a continuous surface with preparation surface **68**. Work surface **78** includes conveyor access opening **156** for providing a food drop-off point for sandwiches prepared at food item assembly and packaging module **66**, as well as those prepared at other locations along assembly line **12**, such as secondary modules **70**, **84** and **86**. As best seen in FIG. **5**, conveyor access opening **156** is preferably located along the central longitudinal axis of work surface **78** so as to be within the convenient reach of food item assembly worker **134**, whether standing in aisle **40** or in aisle **64**. Also, conveyor access opening **156** is sized so as to easily accommodate the largest size of food item packages used, but not so large as to take up excessive space on work surface **78**. While preferably conveyor access opening **156** is an aperture through work surface **78**, conveyor access opening **156** may be provided by other arrangements. For example, a conveyor access may be provided by a gap between modules and/or their work surfaces, such as food item assembly and packaging module **66** and secondary module **70**, and/or their respective work surfaces **68** and **78**. Conveyor access opening **156** may also be provided as an opening through a vertical side of a module along aisles **40** and/or **64**. Additionally, for example, conveyor accessing opening **156** may be provided as generally "U" shaped cut outs in a work surface, such as work surface **78**, appearing adjacent each of aisles **40**, **64**.

Conveyor **16** may optionally be set to run continuously during peak food item preparation periods, or alternatively have a worker initiated start and stop control. Conveyor **16** may also include sensing means to automatically turn on conveyor **16** when a packaged food item is placed on conveyor belt **158**, and automatically turn off conveyor **16** at a desired time, such as when all packaged food items placed on conveyor belt **158** have been transported off conveyor belt **158**.

Conveyor **16** is also positioned underneath work surface **78** of module **70** so as to avoid interference with the work space **174** above work surface **78**. The downstream portion **176** of conveyor **16** may extend into the upstream steamer/toaster module **58** where steamer/toaster devices **60** are positioned for convenient access above conveyor **16**. The downstream end **176** of conveyor belt **158** preferably extends at least to the downstream side **178** of steamer/toaster module **58**. This allows packaged food items **28** conveyed on belt **158** to reach the packaged food item staging module **56** by underneath conveyance through module **58**. As shown in FIG. **2**, packaged food item staging module **56** has a receptacle **182** having a receptacle surface **184** for receiving packaged food items **28** as they exit from conveyor belt **158**. In FIGS. **3**, **4**, **6** and **7**, a partially cut away view of receptacle **182** is provided to show packaged food item **28** held in receptacle **182**. Preferably, receptacle surface **184** is at about the same height as the top surface **188** of conveyor belt **158**, and may have the same or lesser width than that of belt **158**. This allows upstream pack-

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ages 28 exiting from belt 158 to push downstream packages already on receptacle surface 184 to a position further downstream toward food order assembly module 14. This not only prevents packages 28 from being backed up on conveyor belt 158, but preserves a first-in, first-out order for packaged food items 28.

Any other suitable arrangement for staging packaged food items known in the art may be used. For example, a bin (not shown) may be placed at downstream end 176 to provide a receptacle into which exiting food item packages 28 may drop. The bin can be positioned at packaged food item staging module 56. Alternatively, the bin may be attached to steamer/toaster module 58, or to food item assembly module 66 so as to thereby eliminate the need for a separate packaged food item staging module 56.

The use of assembly line 12 of the present invention substantially increases work efficiency. With a typical prior art quick-service restaurant layout and assembly line 12, a typical worker will on the average, be required to travel a distance of about 20 feet for each food item assembled and packaged. With assembly line 12 of the present invention, the average distance traveled per worker to assemble and package a food item is reduced to about 16 feet per food item. This substantial 25% reduction of worker travel distances provides numerous benefits including increased labor efficiencies, increased hourly production rates of sandwiches and other food items, potential reduction of the staff size required to meet food item output demands during peak ordering periods, and/or reduction in worker fatigue.

Assembly line 12 also reduces interference between workers 134 as they move about since food items may be prepared at spaced apart locations and regions along assembly line 12 and kitchen layout 10. Also inventory, supplies, equipment, and other food item components may be accessed with minimal distance traveled and with minimal crossing of the paths of workers 134. Also, workers' paths of travel are not routinely crossed during constant back and forth movement to and from food order assembly module 14 to deliver packaged food items. Instead packaged food items are deposited on conveyor 16 from a proximate food drop-off location provided at conveyor access opening 156. Moreover, conveyor access opening 156 is generally centrally located along the length of the portion of the line provided for assembling and packaging sandwiches, and generally centrally located relative to aisles 40 and 64 to allow working from both sides of assembly line 12. Such arrangements for assembly line 12 not only eliminates or reduces the crossing paths of quickly moving workers, but also increases the safety of the QRS environment.

Moreover, assembly line 12 itself also integrates well within kitchen layout 10. Inventory, storage, cooking equipment and other necessary equipment, and food product components that are incorporated into the food item and packaging for food items, are either included within assembly line 12 or located nearby. Assembly line 12 is also relatively compact and allows for relatively easy expansion to increase food item output, or to accommodate preparation thereon of new food items added to the menu. Such expansion can be accomplished at the upstream end 128 of assembly line 12 leaving its downstream configuration intact, and without expensive changes or relocations of other areas of kitchen layout 10, such as the customer counter area 48, drink station 32, French fry station 36, drive-thru delivery area 50, cooking equipment, increasing aisle width, and the like.

Also, assembly line 12 can be positioned in the restaurant so that only certain operations taking place on assembly line 12 appear in the prominent view of the customers placing and

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awaiting food item order delivery at the customer point-of-sale food delivery location, such as POS registers 46 at counter 48. Those activities that are in the view of such customers include bun conditioning at steamer/toaster module 58 and optionally also the bun conditioning activity taking place at steamer device 138. The activities at food order assembly module 14 may also be in view of such customers and optionally a view of the food item assembly and packaging activities taking place at food item assembly and packaging module 66. Preferably, the cooked food storage, such as staging in cooked food storage device 72 and other UHC cabinets for unpackaged cooked food storage, and cooked food storage at hot water food bath 92 is fully screened from prominent view of customers at point-of-sale food delivery locations. This shows customers that the customers' orders including food items are being prepared just before delivery to the customers. Cooked food storage in other locations of kitchen layout 10 that are off-line of assembly line 12, with the possible exception of French fry station 36, are also screened from the prominent view of customers at the point-of-sale delivery location. Such screening from the prominent view of customers awaiting delivery, of course, also takes place at the point-of-sale of drive-thru delivery area 50.

A second embodiment of food item assembly line 12 is shown in FIG. 6. In this embodiment food item assembly line 12 has a conveyor 194 that extends further upstream than in the first embodiment of the invention. A second packaged food item drop-off location is provided by a conveyor access opening 196 that is located upstream from the drop-off location provided by conveyor access opening 156. As shown in FIG. 6, conveyor access opening 196 is located in work area 191 of secondary module 193 that is adjacent to additional secondary module 195. Food item assembly worker 134 assembling a sandwich at secondary module 193 may deposit a packaged sandwich at second conveyor access opening 196. Thus, food item assembly worker 134 need not take time away from food item assembly and/or packaging duties to walk to conveyor drop off 156 at upstream module 66. This eliminated trip is quite advantageous in peak periods of receiving a high level of food item orders. The second food drop-off location provided by conveyor access opening 196 may also be used by a food item assembly worker 134 who has packaged a food item at secondary modules 195 or 86, the latter especially useful in instances when access to drop off at conveyor access opening 156 is hindered by the presence of another worker temporarily standing at conveyor access opening 156.

FIG. 7 illustrates a modification or alternative configuration of assembly line 12 that includes a vertical grill 198 that may be used for cooking food product such as hamburger patties. An example of such vertical grill cooking equipment is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 7,067,769, issued Jun. 27, 2006, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. Vertical grill 198 is added to the upstream side 202 of the preparation core of the system that includes conveyor 16, food item assembly and packaging module 66 and food order assembly module 14, and typically also includes steamer/toaster module 58, packaged food item staging module 56, and one or more secondary modules providing additional work area for assembling and/or packaging food items, such as secondary modules 70, 84 and 86. The vertical travel path that hamburger patties travel through vertical grill 198 during grilling reduces the amount of space that vertical grill 198 takes up along assembly line 12. It also provides a supply of cooked food filling such as hamburger patties within assembly line 12 further reducing worker travel distances for making a food item such as, for example, a hamburger sandwich.

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It also provides a further example of the flexibility of assembly line **12** to be easily reconfigured to adapt to changes in technology providing new equipment for preparing food items without costly changes to the general layout of restaurant layout **10**.

Other possible modifications of assembly line **12** include utilizing two or more conveyors in series to extend the effective length of the conveyor **16**. For example, an upstream second conveyor (not shown) may be used to service modules **84**, **86**, and conveyor **16** used to service downstream modules **66**, **70**. In this arrangement, packaged food items placed on the upstream conveyor are conveyed downstream to upstream end **170** of conveyor **16** and caused to fall or slide from the upstream conveyor to conveyor **16** for transport to food order assembly module **14**. Also, assembly line **12** can be modified so that each module for assembling and/or packaging food items has its own conveyor access opening providing a drop off location at each of such modules. Also, while the invention has been described in regard to manual food preparation, assembly and packaging, one or more of such manually performed functions may be accomplished automatically by equipment designed for such purposes without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention.

FIG. **8** shows restaurant layout **10** that includes an assembly line **12** that includes vertical grill **198**. It also shows restaurant layout **10** with upstream region **204** which includes inventory storage area **200** for various food item inventory. Upstream region **204** provides space that is available for future expansion of the assembly line **12**, for various food item cooking, assembly and/or packaging stations **206a-d**. One or more of additional stations **206a-d** may be incorporated in-line within assembly line **12**, or as illustrated, be positioned off-line of assembly line **12**. Food items prepared at an off-line module, such as a salad prepared at station **206c** can be dropped off at conveyor access opening **156** or a more upstream located additional food drop-off location such as conveyor access opening **196** shown in the embodiment of FIG. **6**. Once placed on conveyor **16** the packaged food item is automatically conveyed to food order assembly module **14**, thus reducing worker travel distance and preventing bottlenecks at module **14**. As discussed previously, in order to prevent bottlenecks and provide an orderly flow of food items into food order assembly module **14**, food items prepared at a more downstream location can also be conveyed to food order assembly module **14**, such as a noodle food item prepared at noodle preparation station **208**.

FIG. **8** also shows regions of the kitchen layout that localizes activities into areas where all or many of the functions are performed for preparing a type of food item, or in a more general sense preparing food items of a particular menu category. For example, restaurant layout **10** may include a main or regular menu region **212** (shown also in FIG. **1** at a different location), a breakfast menu region **214**, and other regions based on other menus such as a brunch menu. Located within such regions, or within relative proximity thereto, are the various cooking, cooked food storage equipment, other storage such as for packaging and other items associated with the preparation of a food item, or multiple food items included in a menu category. Cooling equipment **218** such as freezers and refrigerators and additional cooked food storage devices **124** may also be located in each or most of the regions to further localize activities associated with food item preparation taking place in a particular region. Certain regions may have other specialized equipment located therein such as toaster **220** for toasting used in preparing toasted items for the breakfast menu. Food items prepared, assembled and packaged in the localized menu regions with a reduced average distance

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for the paths taken by workers accomplish such tasks. Once packaged, a food item is then conveyed by conveyor **16** to the food order assembly module **14** further conserving worker travel distances. The localized regions also are advantageous for restaurants having menus that change through the day. For example, breakfast region **214**, though relatively remote from food order assembly module **14** when compared to regular menu region **212**, is still closely linked to module **14** by the use of conveyor **16** to thereby provide the desired labor efficiencies.

While the invention has been described with respect to certain preferred embodiments, it is to be understood that the invention is capable of numerous changes, modifications and rearrangements without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention as defined in the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order comprising:

providing a first work area for manually assembling and packaging a food item;

providing a second work area for assembling a food order that includes a food item packaged in the first work area;

providing a conveyor beneath the first work area for conveying a packaged food item from the first work area to the second work area;

providing a conveyor access opening proximate to the first work area for allowing downwardly depositing of a food item assembled and packaged at the first work area onto the conveyor;

manually assembling and packaging a food item at the first work area;

thereafter depositing the assembled and packaged food item downwardly from the first work area through the conveyor access opening and onto the conveyor;

thereafter conveying the assembled and packaged food item beneath and along the first work area to the second work area;

thereafter including a packaged food item conveyed from the first work area to the second work area into a food order that is being assembled at the second work area wherein the food order includes the conveyed packaged food item.

2. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

providing a supply of packaging proximate to the first work area;

providing a supply of cooked food item filling proximate to the first work area;

providing a supply of buns for forming the food item proximate to the first work area;

manually accessing the supply of packaging, cooked food item filling, and buns during assembling and packaging a food item composed of at least some of the cooked food item filling material and a bun at the first work area;

providing a supply of items for assembling a food order proximate the second work area; and

manually accessing the supply of items for assembling a food order to assemble a food order at the second work area.

3. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

providing at least a third work area for manually assembling and packaging a food item, the third work area positioned upstream of the first work area, and the third work area including an opening therethrough to provide the conveyor access opening.

4. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

providing at least third and fourth work areas for manually assembling and packaging a food item, the third work

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area and fourth work area positioned upstream of the first work area with a conveyor extending underneath the third work area,
 assembling and packaging a first type of food item at the first work area,
 assembling and packaging a second type of food item at either of the third or fourth work areas; and
 conveying the second type of food item after packaging to the second work area for inclusion of the second type of food item in a food order assembled at the second work area.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising the first work area including a work surface and the conveyor access opening is an opening in the work surface, placing the food item assembled and packaged on the first work area through the access opening and onto the conveyor, and conveying the deposited packaged food item underneath the first work area toward the second work area the first work area.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 forming an assembly line for the assembling and packaging of a food item and a food order that includes a packaged food item by the relative movement of a first movable module and a second movable module, the first movable module including the first work area and the second movable module including the second work area, the relative movement of the first and second movable modules carrying the conveyor into a position for conveying the packaged food item away from the first movable module and toward the second movable module.

7. A method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order comprising:

providing a first work area for manually assembling and packaging a food item, the first work area including a work surface;

providing a second work area for assembling a food order that includes a food item packaged in the first work area; providing a conveyor for conveying a packaged food item from the first work area to the second work area;

providing a conveyor access opening in the work surface of the first work area;

manually assembling and packaging a food item at the first work area;

thereafter depositing the food item assembled and packaged on the first work area through the access opening and onto the conveyor;

thereafter conveying the assembled and packaged food item beneath and along the first work area toward the second work area;

thereafter including a packaged food item conveyed from the first work area to the second work area into a food order that is being manually assembled at the second work area wherein the food order includes the conveyed packaged food item.

8. A method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order comprising:

providing a food item assembly and packaging station comprising a first movable module having a first work area for assembling a food item and packaging an assembled food item;

providing a second movable module having a second work area for assembling a food order that includes at least one packaged food item packaged at the first work area;

providing a conveyor for conveying the packaged food item from the first movable module toward the second movable module, the conveyor integral with one of the first or second movable modules;

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positioning the first movable module and the second movable module relative to each other to form an assembly line for assembling and packaging food items and food orders, whereby the relative positioning of the first movable module and the second movable module moves the conveyor into a position for conveying food items packaged at the first work area to a location proximate the second work area;

assembling and packaging a food item at the first work area;

depositing a packaged food item assembled and packaged at the first work area onto the conveyor;

conveying the packaged food item beneath the first work area to the location proximate the second work area;

assembling at the second work area a food order that includes a food item packaged at the first work area and conveyed on the conveyor from the first work area to the location proximate the second work area.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising providing proximate to the first work area an access opening to the conveyor, and placing a food item packaged at the first work area through the access opening and onto the conveyor.

10. The method of claim 8 wherein the relative positioning of the first movable module and the second movable module moves the conveyor to a position that extends from a location proximate the first work area to the location proximate the second work area for conveying a packaged food item from the location proximate the first work area to a location proximate the second work area.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein the first work area includes a work surface, the conveyor access comprising an opening in the work surface whereby the food item assembled and packaged on the first work area can be placed through the opening in the work surface and deposited on the conveyor for conveyance underneath the first work area toward the second work area.

12. The method of claim 8 further comprising the assembly line including a third movable module,

positioning the third movable module upstream from the first movable module, the third movable module including a secondary work area positioned proximate to the food item assembly and packaging station whereat the conveyor extends upstream from the first movable module to a position proximate to the third movable module;

assembling and packaging at the secondary work area of the third movable module food items of a different type than those packaged at the food item assembly and packaging station of the first movable module;

depositing a food item packaged at the secondary work area of the third movable module onto the conveyor at a location on the conveyor that is upstream from the first movable module,

conveying downstream the deposited food item packaged at the third movable module in a downstream direction from the third movable module, underneath the first work area of the first movable module and upstream from the first movable module toward the second movable module.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the third movable module includes the conveyor access opening.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the conveyor extends upstream from the first movable module and into the third movable module.

15. A method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order comprising:

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providing a food item assembly and packaging station comprising at least a first movable module having a first work area for assembling a food item and packaging an assembled food item;
 providing a food order assembly station comprising at least a second movable module having a second work area for assembling a food order that includes at least one packaged food item packaged on the first work area;
 providing a conveyor for conveying the packaged food item from the first movable module toward the second movable module, the conveyor integral with and carried by one of the first or second movable modules;
 forming an assembly line for assembling and packaging food items and food orders by the relative positioning of the first module and the second module, wherein the relative positioning carries the conveyor into a position for conveying under the first work area food items packaged at the first work area toward the food order assembly station;
 assembling and packaging a food item at the first work area;
 depositing from a position proximate to the first work area a food item packaged at the first work area onto the conveyor; thereafter
 conveying the deposited packaged food item downstream from the first work area toward the food order assembly station; thereafter
 removing the conveyed packaged food item from the conveyor; and thereafter
 assembling at the food order assembly station a food order that includes the packaged food item removed from the conveyor.

16. The method of claim **15** further comprising:

positioning a third movable module downstream from the first movable module and upstream of the second movable module when the first movable module, the second movable module and the third movable module are positioned to form the assembly line, the third movable module having a downstream side, the conveyor mounted to the first movable module, and when the first, second and third movable modules have been positioned to form the assembly line, the conveyor extends downstream from the first movable module, through the third movable module and downstream from the downstream side of the third movable module, whereby packaged food items can be conveyed underneath the first work area of the first movable module, and thereafter conveyed downstream from the food item assembly and packaging station and through the third movable module and downstream past the downstream side of the third movable module and toward the second movable module.

17. The method of claim **15** further comprising

positioning the third movable module in the assembly line, the third movable module including at least one bun conditioning system; and
 conditioning in the bun conditioning system a bun to be included in the food item assembled at the first work area.

18. The method of claim **17** further comprising:

positioning a fourth movable module in the assembly line upstream from the second movable module, the fourth movable module including a heating means for maintaining a packaged food item at an elevated temperature and a work surface having an access opening for removing therethrough the packaged food item held at the fourth movable module;

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conveying a packaged food item through the third movable module to a position at the fourth movable module; holding the packaged food item at the fourth movable module while maintaining the packaged food item at an elevated temperature; and
 thereafter removing the packaged food item from the fourth movable module and including the removed packaged food item in an assembled and packaged food order.

19. The method of claim **15** further comprising positioning at least one cooked food storage device proximate to the first work area for staging a cooked food filling;

removing the cooked food filling from the cooked food storage device; and

including the removed cooked food filling in the packaged food item assembled and packaged at the first work area.

20. The method of claim **19** further comprising:

providing a point-of-sale food delivery location for delivering food orders to a customer;

providing at least one bun conditioning system positioned proximate to the first work area for conditioning a bun included in a food item assembled at the first work area; and

positioning the assembly line at a location where the bun conditioning system is prominently visible to a customer located at the customer point-of-sale food delivery location and where the cooked food storage device is not prominently visible to a customer at the point-of-sale food delivery location.

21. A method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order comprising:

providing a first work area for manually assembling and packaging a food item;

providing a second work area for assembling a food order that includes a food item packaged in the first work area; providing a conveyor for conveying a packaged food item from the first work area to the second work area;

providing a conveyor access opening proximate to the first work area;

providing at least a third work area and a fourth work area for manually assembling and packaging food items, the third work area and fourth work area positioned upstream of the first work area with a conveyor extending underneath the third work area,

manually assembling and packaging a first type of food item at the first work area

thereafter depositing at the conveyor access opening a packaged and assembled food item onto the conveyor;

conveying the assembled and packaged food item beneath and along the first work area to the second work area;

assembling and packaging a second food item at one of the third and fourth work areas;

depositing the second food item onto the conveyor;

conveying the second food item after packaging to the second work area; and

including a packaged food item conveyed from the first work area and a packaged item from one of the third and fourth work areas to the second work area into one or more food orders being assembled at the second work area.

22. A method of assembling and packaging a food item to be included in a food order comprising:

providing a first work area for manually assembling and packaging a food item;

providing a second work area for assembling a food order that includes a food item packaged in the first work area;

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providing a conveyor for conveying a packaged food item from the first work area to the second work area;
providing a conveyor access opening proximate to the first work area;
forming an assembly line for the assembling and packaging 5
of a food item and a food order that includes a packaged food item by the relative movement of a first movable module and a second movable module, the first movable module including the first work area and the second movable module including the second work area, 10
the relative movement of the first and second movable modules carrying the conveyor into a position for conveying the packaged food item away from the first movable module and toward the second movable module;

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assembling and packaging a food item at the first work area;
thereafter depositing at the conveyor access opening a packaged and assembled food item onto the conveyor;
thereafter conveying the assembled and packaged food item beneath and along the first work area to the second work area;
thereafter including a packaged food item conveyed from the first work area to the second work area into a food order that is being assembled at the second work area wherein the food order includes the conveyed packaged food item.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 8,307,951 B2
APPLICATION NO. : 13/310115
DATED : November 13, 2012
INVENTOR(S) : Gerald A. Sus et al.

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Col. 15, Line 19,
Claim 5, Line 7, delete "the first work area".

Signed and Sealed this
Fifth Day of February, 2013

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Teresa Stanek Rea".

Teresa Stanek Rea
Acting Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office